

GLASGOW. MAY 2011

First of all, dear Neil Baxter, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity of been here, in GLASGOW, one of those cities that has a mythical status for us, architects, thanks mainly, but not only, to Mackintosh. I am really nervous, waiting for the promised citytour on Saturday.

Well, I firmly believe that, as a professor, one has the duty, the obligation to show and explain his work. Not, of course, as a model to imitate, but rather as an opportunity to reflect upon that work.

So, I will try to explain some of the considerations that were crucial in the development of each project. It is my hope that these reflections may be of interest to you, and due to my optimistic nature, that you may even enjoy it.

Today I am going to present some projects, from a specific point of view: that of MATERIALITY. This is why I decided to title this presentation ARCHITEXTURE: that is, architecture from the point of view of texture, the quality of its material.

Our architecture wants to pay attention to materials; we like to use very physical materials. We try to explore the expressive possibilities of different materials. That allows us, on the one hand, to try to master different techniques, and exploit their potential. On the other hand, it also avoids the dangers of style. Style is the death of an architect. When he starts repeating formulas, avoiding experimentation, copying himself, he dies of boredom, of intellectual boredom.

Nevertheless, I don't believe that the material itself determines anything. Architecture is an exercise of the freedom of an architect. Almost nothing is a given. Of course, there is the law of gravity and economic restraints, and even the overwhelming building code. But the most determinant factor is always the freedom of the architect, derived from his mastery of knowledge and culture, and his decision to innovate and to take risks.

But I have only 30 minutes for my presentation. So let us go to the PowerPoint.

LAS MATAS

In the Las Matas house, we used for the first time cement stucco oxidized with iron sulphate, a kind of rust stained cement stucco. It was an experiment with a formula that we invented, very cheap and interesting.

It is a house which is buried to a great extent, so that its enormous volume is partially hidden. This was something important to us. There is a kind of obscenity in the ostentation with which some mansions presents themselves to the visitor. It is like an arrogant affirmation of luxury reflected in overwhelming dimensions.

Here the house is shown gradually, in fragments. It has a very complex entry process; I am willing to admit that maybe is excessive, even too emphatic. But it is a house for people that like to entertain, to receive friends and guests, and that successive discovery seemed important to us.

The intimacy of the house, its privacy, is determined by the impossibility of recognizing specific functions in the stacking of prisms, in the way the volumes fit together. The visitor cannot identify bedrooms, bathrooms or living spaces.

Only a porch, open to the garden, invites ones to leave the car. I have heard comments linking this house to influences of Barragán. Of course I admire Barragán, but it seems clear to me that there is nothing of his monastic simplicity here, of his stripped down asceticism. It is much more complex and baroque. Even the unwashed oxide of the walls owes more to Rome than to Mexico; those Roman façades that evidence the passing of time, history, life.

The use of simple, cheap materials, conferring an almost industrial look, seemed to me especially appropriate for a house of these dimensions, the antithesis of ostentation.

There are clear references to Adolf Loos idea of *raumplan*, with some direct citations. I am very interested in Loos' research on single-family homes, and his contribution to the bourgeois house.

SENIORS RESIDENCE. ALCAZAR

Taking advantage of the experience of this house, we used the same material, rust stained cement, in this project, for an Order of Nuns that manage an old aged home in a village of La Mancha.

This institution is a welcome presence in the town, in which the Old People's Home is a loved institution. The built volume is important, so we proposed a kind of laid-down skyscraper.

Rust stained cement is a cheap and a very appropriate solution for the Alcazar de San Juan surroundings; brown and red oxidized soil. We designed a garden of native plants, even reusing the olive trees that had been removed for the construction, adding gravel paths of easy maintenance.

The chapel conforms the main façade. One starting condition was to maintain the image of the Madonna of the previous chapel. We included it in a golden wall, floating over the illuminated void. The nun's cloistered chapel crosses the temple levitating at mid-height, the cross lighting is intended to emphasize the religious atmosphere.

FACULTY OF JOURNALISM IN NAVARRE

When we were asked to do a building to house the Faculty of Journalism of the University of Navarre, we had our first opportunity of experiment with concrete. We used a very exquisite modular form work in order to obtain a smooth finished surface.

This project is a kind of manifesto. And everyone knows that manifestos must exaggerate a bit in order to be effective.

The main space is the big hall, with is much more than a circulation vestibule. We wanted it to be the space where, on cold and rainy days, students would carry out their dialogues and exchanges of university life. A kind of covered plaza.

Nevertheless, the main façade is absolutely closed to the beautiful campus, except for a low and panoramic aperture, that is set back in such a way that direct light does not enter; only the view is allowed. All the natural illumination of the vestibule is reflected on the large opaque wall through a skylight hidden from sight. It is the wall that illuminates.

The other only two gestures, let's say, that appear on the façade, make reference to the vertical circulation. There are two fissures, thin and deep, one horizontal and the other vertical. They correspond to the two staircases in the lobby, one of which runs parallel and the other perpendicular to the façade. In each one of them there is one step, just one, from which the view of the campus appears through the fissure. Neither on the previous nor on the next does anything happen. To quote Oscar Wilde: *"It is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied"*.

But even so, the staircase is thus qualified. It is not only about something that allows passage from, say, the ground level to the first or second 3.2 level. It offers an architectural experience between architecture inside and nature outside.

LA MORALEJA

While In Navarre we used an exquisite care for the formwork, in this house in Madrid this wood formwork was much less accurate, mainly for economic reasons. So, we decided to sandblast the concrete, obtaining a stone like texture.

The cross scheme plan is very clear, almost simple, elemental: an arm for the parents, another for the children, another for common areas and another for service.

It is a big house, for a young family with seven children. They wanted something absolutely private, very friendly and not ostentatious, and to be all on one floor. The house should go unnoticed from the exterior, despite its size. We designed the main patio, the entrance courtyard, as a potent gesture that allows privacy and the possibility of parking many cars inside, but not in plain sight.

The porch is lateral, so it doesn't interfere with the views of the living room. It floats in part over the garden, dominating the landscape.

The children's hallway has a low, panoramic window, open to a pleasant courtyard. Only the kids may see to the sky.

SANTA LUCIA

We also used sandblasted concrete, but in this case white, in this office building in Madrid. The plan, as usual in office buildings, is mainly a problem of flexibility and good circulation. So, the structure is in the façade, a structural system with an irregular grid.

There are slight variations in the location of columns and beams, some time set to flush and sometimes set to back. This produces special vibrations, a surprising rhythm.

Setting back the glass façade produces powerful shadows. Some columns are turned, showing their corner edge, instead of a plane face. In other places the vertical columns disappear, creating double highded apertures. But they are minimal, subtle interventions. I am convinced that they will go unobserved to the majority of those that walk through Plaza de España.

On the upper floors are the director's offices. We placed a kind of lattice or sculpture, some bronze trees that can be seen from the Gran Vía. The inner courtyard is open to the public, something usual in, say, New York, but really unusual in Madrid. That is why its façade reproduces the compositional scheme of the main façade. It has been turned into a very enticing oasis in the city.

FUNERARY CHAPEL

Having used smooth surfaced concrete and sandblasted concrete, we decided to experience a natural wood formwork in this municipal funerary services center in a small village not far from Madrid, in order to obtain a vibrant surface, changing with variations of light and weather.

Here the concrete, made with the local red sand, has a colored finish of rustic texture, that contrasts with the white ceramic pyramids of the viewing halls.

LAS ENCINAS

I am going to show you a house that is very different to those we have designed to date. The client asked us to make it compact; according to him *"nothing what you call...longitudinal"*. Moreover, he suggested we use stone.

We had never used stone. So we were confronted with a new opportunity to learn. So, we used the granite *costeros*, the stone that is rejected in the quarries and that has the traces of the boreholes.

Its large module introduces a disconcerting scale, which minimizes the huge dimensions of the house. The very material suggests the form. It is a kind of large block of stone, with incisions and cuts on the corner. And the rough, strong, jagged exterior conceals a brilliant and white interior. All the volumetric and special richness is inside. The rigidness of the exterior prism prevents one from suspecting the complexity in the interior. There are courtyards, and light wells that bring the garden and light to every corner.

We paid special attention to the art works of young artists, specially ordered for this house. Here you can see the library, with a bookcase of translucent glass.

The layout, at first sight, can appear convoluted, even labyrinth like; but is intended to emphasize the privacy of the family members.

Here is a view from the gym towards the Jacuzzi area and the inner swimming pool, always using the same stone.

NEW OPERA HOUSE IN MADRID

When we won the competition for the new Opera House in Madrid - which I present only a couple of images- it was with a very plastic project, a kind of leisure, celebration, party architecture, that wants to be both festive and extraordinary in itself. The show starts before you enter, with this glazed façade, made of glass silk-screened with a golden pattern.

IBIZA

At the same time, we were designing a house on the island of Ibiza, a summer home, to live in a bathing suit; so, it should be refreshing and bright.

Far from the usual schemes of white cubes contrasting with the landscape, we proposed glazed prisms like blocks of ice that, depending of the light, reflect the landscape, or they shine, or disappear camouflaged among the trees.

At that time, we knew nothing of the glass techniques, so we had to experiment in this house, in order to prepare the Opera House project..

EXPOZARAGOZA PAVILLION

For the Expo of Zaragoza, three years ago, we won the competition for the pavilions-stations for the aerial cable car system.

An Expo pavilion should be something quickly built, and quickly dismantled. And for Zaragoza, and summer, you absolutely need shadow and ventilation. So we proposed an *Umbraculus* (a shelter for the sun, sunshade), a light construction of perforated, deployé steel (expanded metal screen), which allows for cross ventilation in the building.

The steel plates wrap up the program in a simple and logical way. So, the entrance is a funnel-like structure, which guides the users to the cabs. The arrival pavilion, taking advantage of the height of arrival, displays a big staircase that folds the parcel-like steel surface.

Everything is aerial, light, ventilated, shaded. The interior emphasizes the refreshing atmosphere. The night view shows the light construction and the transparency of the building.

PARISH CHURCH IN RIVAS. MADRID

This Parish Church in Rivas, a village near Madrid, is a clear example of budget restrictions determining a material, and therefore a design. The parochial community had an opportunity of an economical supply of *corten* steel, and we were asked to use it. In addition, the long and narrow plot could barely accommodate the program. The decision was made to create a unique volume housing the church, the parochial center and two dwellings for priests.

This volume accepts the geometrical conditions of the plot, with an acute angle to the south, and something like an explosion of skylights to the north, marking the temple's head. In the interior, those skylights form an altarpiece of dramatic light, while the rest of the church is subtly illuminated through fine rows of oblique openings.

HOUSE IN LA FLORIDA. MADRID

A wonderful plot, full of large mature trees, close to Madrid: there we designed a big house for an art collector.

Taking care of the trees –and what is more, their roots- impeded a single volume and encouraged light construction with minimal foundations. So we designed tree pavilions, linked through glass corridors, all with a steel structure clad in aluminium panels and large pieces of glass.

The main entrance offers a view of the art pavilion. Another one, housing the living room and common spaces, has an inner height of 4.5 ms and big sliding glass pieces that allows an open air living, omitting porches.

PARISH CHURCH IN PONFERRADA.

Finally, we are in process of finishing two parochial centres built with panels of prefabricated concrete. It is a quick and relatively cheap procedure: I will show one of them quickly.

The model shows the triangular plot, the parochial complex and dwellings to the left and the church to the right, topped with huge skylights, and a big portico in the lower part. As in Rivas, the church is intended to contrast with the surrounding blocs of apartments, making it a point of reference in the urban fabric. That is the role of the skylights. As a matter of fact, the interior of the temple is not a high space, that would not welcome people, but low, comfortable, pleasant and brilliant. It is a large space, of course, but mainly a horizontal one, qualified by the natural light coming down from the skylights.

You can see the interior before completion, without furnishing, and a view of the altar, recently installed.

So, thank you for your patience.